

**An Account of the Old Catholic Work in the Diocese of
Fond du Lac, together with Important Documents and
Letters.**

[By Joseph René Vilatte]

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AN ACCOUNT
—OF THE—
OLD CATHOLIC WORK
—IN THE—
DIOCESE OF FOND DU LAC,
—TOGETHER WITH—
IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS AND LETTERS.

PUBLISHED BY THE MISSION.

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1887.

The Old Catholic Mission,
State of Wisconsin, U.S.A.

As the mission of the Old Catholics has been established now for
two years in this country, we think the time has come to give to our friends
and to the public at large a detailed account of what has been accomplished,

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what is the present situation, and what is the outlook or prospect for the future.

SECTION I.

ITS PAST AND ORIGIN.—Much has been already said concerning the Rev. Rene Vilatte, the founder of the work in America. Public papers have repeatedly state how this young and energetic priest, a Parisian by birth, was educated as a Gallican for the Roman Catholic priesthood. How, before taking Holy Orders, he became convinced of the error of the Roman position, and under the auspices of the Rt. Rev. J.H.H. Brown, Bishop of Fond du Lac for the Episcopal Church, resolved to inaugurate and to establish in this country the Old Catholic Church of Europe. As the Christian truth dawned clearer and clearer before his eyes his convictions deepened, and brought him back to such a catholicism as is embodied in the Anglican Church and primitive Christianity. His motto has ever since been, "Catholicism without Romanism."

Such is precisely the stand of the Old Catholic Church. Everybody knows how, since the proclamation of the dogmas of the immaculate conception of the blessed Virgin Mary in 1854 and of the papal infallibility in 1870, the Old Catholic movement has become historical. These arbitrary and uncatholic additions to the historical faith of Christendom as embodied in the ancient creeds, have separated from the Latin obedience a considerable constituency in France, Switzerland, Italy and Germany, organized by such intrepid spirits, de[3/4]vout and truly Catholic, as Reinkens, Herzog, the great theologian Dollinger, Campello, Savarese, the brilliant Hyacinthe Loyson, and, not to forget the faithful departed, the grand and eloquent Montalembert.

It has been said with all truth that the Old Catholic movement in the closing scenes of this 19th century is the last analysis of Gallicanism; the Gallicanism of the French Church under the reign of Louix XIV, championed and adorned by those princes and saints of the Church, Jansenius, Pascal, Bossuet, Fenelon and Guennel. Father Vilatte is a child of Gallicanism in its present essence. The mission of Old Catholics is to lead, like true prophets, the children of the Latin Church out of their house of bondage, out of the Egypt of Ultramontanism. And here I pray to be allowed to make a remark suggested by the matter in question.

Some well-intentioned but thoughtless or, I presume, prejudiced children of the Episcopal Church seem to be averse to the Old Catholic movement in general and to Father Vilatte's course in particular. Even among the reverend clergy of the Church we have met with some opposition. Great was our surprise indeed when, since we have been associated with Father Vilatte's work, we read what follows in a letter

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written to him by a prominent Episcopal priest: "I do not know that we have done anything to show sympathy with your work; as a fact I cannot approve of it or of the methods in which it is carried on. I believe that you are in many ways sincere and good, but I think that you will sometime bitterly regret the course you are pursuing." And another prominent clergyman, when asked for assistance, deemed suitable to reply to Pere Vilatte, "I advise you to return whence you came; the best thing for you would be to return to Rome." Thus, according to the sentiments of these reverend gentlemen, a Christian convinced of the errors and false teachings of the Roman Church should wilfully and obstinately, against the dictates of conscience and reason, persist in believing, or trying to believe, what he knows to be erroneous and heretical. For notice, pray, that such is the necessity of belief imposed by the Roman Church that the so-called dogma of papal infallibility is a strict requisite, a condition *sine qua non* of being a member or child of the Church. The Church of Rome says, "Believe in [4/5] the papal infallibility, believe in the immaculate conception, and profess these teachings as true and Catholic, or you are heretics, excommunicated and reprobates."

Strange as it may appear, it is true that some priests of the Anglican Church, inconsistent with themselves and with the teachings of their own Church, want Roman Catholics to profess what they themselves deny and reprove, and impose upon the shoulders of Roman Catholics the hateful burdens which they have taught them to throw off. Not so acted that noble and devoted servant of the Church the learned and courageous Dr. Dollinger. When request to submit and assent to the new, absurd, historically false and blasphemous dogma of the papal infallibility he replied, "I am too old a man; at my age I cannot afford to assent to a lie." As for us, we have always believed and are convinced that as soon as a Christian has found out the error and inconsistency of his Church with his conscience, it is a duty for him to search for truth and the true Church of CHRIST, which cannot admit of erroneous dogmatic teachings; and when it is found to thank GOD, and to embrace and join it faithfully.

But to return to Pere Vilatte. After the suggestion of Pere Hyacinthe, with whom Pere Vilatte was then in correspondence, the Bishop of Fond du Lac decided to send Pere Vilatte to Berne, Switzerland, to be ordained in rapid succession deacon and priest by Bishop Herzog. This course was decided upon on account of religious prejudices on the part of the Belgians for whose religious wants Bishop Brown had selected him. If he had gone as an American priest among them he would have been ignored as a Protestant minister. Anglican Orders, particularly when derived from an Episcopate officially styled "Protestant," are in disrepute with all Roman Catholics; the very name of Protestant is hateful and makes them shrink back; in short, they will have nothing to do with anything connected

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with Protestantism. On the other hand Old Catholic Orders, like the Greek, are held to be valid by them. The Bishop of Fond du Lac had the sagacity to see this and decide accordingly. Pere Vilatte, ordained a priest by Bishop Herzog, returned to the country of his adoption, and immediately set out to his mission. Let us follow him in his earnest, arduous, and important work.

[6] Of Pere Vilatte it may be said more strictly than of any of the Roman priests lately converted to the Anglican ministry that he has been sent to save the "lost sheep of Israel." To be convinced of it we have only to look at what was the condition of these poor Belgians whom it was his duty to gain and to save. The mission field lies about 250 miles north of Chicago, and embraces the whole peninsula from Green Bay northward, formed by the waters of Lake Michigan and Green Bay. Over this area are spread about 30,000 Belgians, chiefly farmers, intermingled with French Canadians, Bohemians, Germans and Indians. To depict the miserable condition of these poor people we have only to quote Pere Vilatte's own words:

"The poverty of these Belgian farmers, who form a colony of several villages, deserves the general attention of the benevolent, as only a short time ago these families came from Europe and found themselves under the necessity of investing all they had to provide the necessary implements for cultivating the land. At present it is with the greatest struggle that these families are able to provide for their first wants, and in many places we see misery get the upper hand. Of course this state of affairs will not last, for these families are true workmen, and the day will come when the labors of these ploughmen will enable them to reap the product of their work. But at present it is the greatest misery possible to meet. Such is the material situation of several villages that encircle us.

But this misery is nothing compared with the spiritual destitution of the population. The knowledge of the Gospel is unknown here; salvation through JESUS CHRIST is a secondary consideration. One example among hundreds will suffice. A Roman Catholic, after having attended church for 30 years, confessed that when instructed in the Christian religion, that he never knew that JESUS CHRIST died for our salvation; that it was the first time he had had any clear idea of our redemption. The greatest ignorance, superstition, sorcery, fanaticism and shameful practices find thousands of adherents. The religion of the people consists simply in forms; the nobleness of Christian character is unknown, and the heart has no part in Christian practices. A great number of families feel the need of a purer and less human religion. These families I hope to reach, taking into consideration how much GOD has blessed my past work, if only a few friends are willing to aid me in this great and arduous undertaking."

[7] From my own observation, as confirmation of the preceding report, I am able to state that before the arrival of Pere Vilatte no trace of Christian religion was left among those people. Yes, they had been once upon a time Roman Catholics, but for many years they had lost all knowledge of their religion, and had ceased entirely to attend religious services. One of the most intelligent of the Belgian population said to me: "For three years myself, my wife and family and all my friends had not been in any church; nor were our children baptized, nor was there left among us any idea of moral duty or religious obligation." They were becoming worse

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than heathens. A great part of them were drifting away into practices of Spiritism, and are actually still attending in masses the Sunday meetings of this unchristian sect.

The reader may well ask how this sad condition of the once Catholic Belgians has been effected. The answer is simply this: their Holy Mother, the Roman Catholic Church, has sadly neglected them; nay, has made them sceptics and infidels. The priests sent here have been, as a rule, immoral men, or at the best, not such as could command even the respect of the peasantry. Facts of gross immorality and drunkenness on the part of these priests have come to my knowledge, facts so frequent and of such character that I no longer wonder that these poor people lost all respect and belief in religion and its representatives. As one young man observed to me: "These priests show plainly by their conduct that they have no fear of hell or future punishment; how could they make us believe in it?" Fortunately for some of the priests the Canadian frontier was near enough to place them beyond the reach of the law. Other Roman priests have made a traffic of their religion and of the Holy Sacraments, and so made religion itself hateful and odious to the people. They were accustomed to extort money in sums of ten and fifteen dollars before they would consent to administer the last Sacrament. Even Holy Baptism has been made a subject of traffic by these faithless priests. Not long ago a mother, in order to have her infant child buried, was request to pay five dollars to the priest for his labor, and as she had not the money she was left to bury the child with her own hands in her own garden. About the same time, after a baptism, the godfather [7/8] and godmother each presented the priest with half a dollar. The priest threw the money indignantly on the ground, reproaching them for their scanty offering; but the godfather picking up the money and putting it in his pocket replied properly: "If you do not judge it worth the trouble to receive a dollar in your hand, I think it worth the trouble to pick it up." One of our poorest farmers called on the priest, living at a distance of some eighteen miles, requesting him to administer the last Sacraments to his dying wife. The priest told him to provide him with a carriage and pay first on the spot the sum of eight dollars for his labor. As the poor man had not with him the money required, the woman was left to die without the religious rites she implored.

As regards the lack of education, this unfortunate fact is due to the culpable negligence of their mother Church of Rome in not providing them with proper school instruction. The Church authorities will not allow the children to attend the Protestant schools, neither will the Church give them light from her own torch. And thus it comes to pass that though for upwards of thirty years they have been colonizing the Green Bay district of Wisconsin, the language of their adopted country is an unknown tongue to them, and only a small minority of them to-day are able to read and write

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their native French. Such is the condition of the poor people among whom Pere Vilatte has been laboring for two years.

And what were the means that enabled him to combat the evil just described? It required indeed a man of his temper and strong moral powers to assume such a work. Pere Vilatte saw plainly that, after the example of the Divine Master, self-sacrifice, abnegation and poverty were the necessary requisites. When he arrived at Little Sturgeon, the flock of his choice and of his love, he had a great deal of trouble to secure a shelter; and the poor woman who finally admitted him under her roof, when told by her husband that he was not a Roman priest, assigned him a couch of straw, Pere Vilatte overhearing her say "that it was a bed good enough for a heretic." (We ask pardon of Pere Vilatte for bringing to light these little details.) This poor woman told us herself, with tears in her eyes, how she had received the brave priest who was to bring them the most precious gift of GOD.

[9] After some days and great pains, a house was secured, which performed the office at the same time of the House of God and a residence for His priest. On the one side was the chapel, on the other the priest's room. This poor, one-storied frame building has been described in public papers, which spares us the trouble of further details. Here the first altar was erected to God, made out of an old kitchen door supported by some rude boards. Here the priest lived in his room, which was at the same time office, kitchen, dining room and bed room. Some old wooden boxes and barrels were used for chairs, old carpets and hay for a resting place. Here the missionary lived for one winter on bread and cheese, with seldom any cooked food whatever. Out of respect for this relic of the past we have visited with emotion the place, which recalled to our mind the poor manger of Bethlehem.

Out of curiosity the people came on Sundays to assist at the holy service and to listen to Pere Vilatte's instructions. Little by little they were touched, convinced and the small congregation increased. The idea that they could be Catholics and yet not Roman was new to them. But it was so acceptable or they were so ripe for it that when Pere Vilatte had been there but a month nineteen families had enrolled themselves as his parishioners, his temporary chapel was crowded to suffocation (a congregation of seventy-five), and he had the promise of a plot of land and \$400 towards a church. Soon all the French-speaking people of the country were stirred up, a glebe of forty acres was purchased and a church and presbytery erected at a cost of \$4,500, of which debt the last \$800 are being paid now. The Sisters of St. Mary, at Kenosha, presented the mission church with a beautiful altar; beautiful new pews were placed, altar ornaments were presented by benefactors, and to-day the House of GOD is such as becomes the dwelling place of the LORD.

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Still the mission was poor—so poor that one day the missionary sold his watch to provide money for the laborers on his new church. Consequently during the winter of that same year, 1886, Pere Vilatte went to the East, visiting New York, Philadelphia, Washington and Baltimore to beg for his beautiful work and cover the expenses of it, and collected the sum of \$1,200. On Thursday, September 16, Rt. Rev. J. [9/10] H. H. Brown, Bishop of Fond du Lac, visited for the first time the new mission, consecrated the new church, and administered Holy Confirmation to twenty-seven persons. Certainly such a scene was never before witnessed in the American Church. The candidates were presented two by two, Belgians, Germans, Bohemians, Menominees, Chippewas. Probably beside the Bishop and clergy accompanying him there was but one family present to whom the English language was a birthright. The Holy Communion was celebrated by Pere Vilatte in French, according to the ritual of the Old Catholics of Europe. This brings me to speak of the Old Catholic Ritual as a powerful means to bring about the conversion of the people.

LITURGY.—The Old Catholic Church admits all the dogmas and doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, minus the superstitions and additions of recent ages. It denies the papal infallibility, immaculate conception, etc.; it insists that the mass, vespers and other services, shall be read in the language of the people and not in Latin; that the Bible shall be used and studied by the people; that the Sacraments shall be free; that confession shall not be obligatory; that the Holy Communion shall be received under both substances of Bread and Wine, and that the priests shall have liberty to marry.

Whoever has been present at the mass in a Roman Catholic church knows how little attention the congregation pays to the doings and sayings at the Altar. During all the Holy Sacrifice they do not even look up to it, but are engaged in saying over their rosaries or reading private devotions in their prayer books. This is but the natural consequence of Roman obstinacy in insisting that holy service shall be performed in Latin, a dead language, hardly understood by the priests themselves. Of them it may be said literally: "They worship Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me." But he who for the first time has witnessed a solemn high Celebration of the Old Catholics, with all the proper and traditional accessories, has witnessed a scene he never can forget. One can hardly imagine the delight of these poor people when they hear the beautiful prayers of the Catholic Liturgy uttered in their native tongue, and associate their hearts and lips with the utterances of the Church. Their eyes fastened upon [10/11] the Altar, they follow from beginning to end the holy service, their faces beaming with delight, their hearts pouring forth their feelings of devotion to GOD.

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From personal observation I can testify that the Holy Service in the vernacular tongue is one of the most powerful attractions of the Old Catholic Church, as it is of the Anglican, and that it is perhaps their greatest advantage over the Roman obedience. As a matter only of æsthetics or ideal beauty, this divine service is so attractive that I no longer wonder how Sunday after Sunday it draws large crowds of foreigners to the Church to enjoy the beautiful sight, and that parishioners flock together from distances of twenty to thirty miles not to miss the precious gift of Heaven. This and other successes of the work are a great consolation to the heart of the missionary, but do not imagine that the roses are without thorns. The work of the Old Catholics in America has met and is yet meeting with very strong opposition.

This opposition arises first from the ignorance and prejudices of the people themselves. On the one hand they have been taught that the Church of Rome is the celestial city in the midst of a hostile world of heretics, and that the religion of the Vatican is the only Christian and Catholic religion. On the other hand they have no longer any confidence whatever in that religion and its ministers. The sad and bad examples of their former priests have extinguished in their hearts all respect and trust in them, and it required a long time to convince them that the Old Catholic priest is not modelled nor trained after the morals of the Roman priest. The result is not only that spiritualism and practical atheism have honeycombed a large portion of them, but also that, before affecting anything, the missionary has first to overcome their aversion and gain their confidence; a work of patience and pain if ever there was any.

Hence we can imagine the complete isolation of Pere Vilatte when he first came among them; how he lived for months almost without any friend or anyone to show him sympathy; suspected, despised, isolated. Fortunately the greater part of these prejudices have been overcome, as the people become day by day more enlightened and return from their errors and ignorance.

[12] But more bitter opponents, as might be expected, have been encountered from the Roman Catholics of the jurisdiction within which our work lies. The authorities of the Roman Church have become frightened and have taken all means to strengthen their position. The Roman Bishop of Green Bay has even sent his priest controversialists to meet Father Vilatte and to endeavor by threats and bribery to induce him to return to the fold. Pere Vilatte was formally excommunicated at Easter-tide of last year by the vicar-general of Green Bay; and since Bishop Brown's visitation to the mission a Roman priest from a Roman altar in the neighborhood made the following speech: "I am told that twenty-six persons have received confirmation from a Protestant Bishop. There is not a drop of Catholic blood in your veins if you do not crush this schismatic priest as

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you would a worm of the ground, and those who have taken part in the performances [*grimaces*] of that Bishop.” When saying the above words the priest uttering them stamped his foot upon the altar pace and shook his fist in the direction of the Old Catholic church. Pere Vilatte has often been cautioned by his people not to expose himself, as his life is not free from the danger of fanatical attack. Conscious, however, of the discharge of his duty to GOD and his people, he has only laughed at his people’s fears and gone about fearlessly as though no danger opposed him.

The Roman Catholic Bishop of Green bay did not deem it sufficient to excommunicate the priest of so great spirit and courage; he gave himself the trouble to write personally to one of the principal parishioners of Pere Vilatte to denounce the priest and undermine his endeavors. As a curious piece of Roman epistolary and of conceit we give here a copy of this precious epistle.

DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY,
GREEN BAY, WIS., Sept. 3, 1886.

Mr. N——, *Little Sturgeon, Wis.*:

DEAR SIR,—I am sorry indeed to hear of you that you have really turned your back to the Church of your fathers and follow a man who is an apostate from his Church. Who would have thought this of you, whom I would have trusted more than anyone! Listen now to me, your Bishop; learn the wrong way, the way that leads to perdition. One day sure you will be sorry for what you have done, but perhaps too late, alas! The wrong you do is greater yet because you have some influence, and [12/13] thereby draw many others into ruin. You ought to know your holy religion better than to be deluded and seduced by a man who, within the space of a few years has professed three or four kinds of religion. You ought to esteem the faith of your ancestors higher than to sacrifice it for a farce, for this Old Catholicism or Christian Catholicism is but the latest religious farce. There is but one Catholicism, the Roman, the true one. If I find it worth while to write to you, please find it worth while to listen to me and to think about your eternal salvation; for a Catholic who falls away from his Church cannot be saved. You will find it out, but *no*;—I hope you will return before you find it out.

Yours,

FRED. KATZER, Bishop-elect.

But all this opposition did not bear the expected fruits; on the contrary it had the result of drawing closer to the missionary his devoted friends, and of making his work known to those who never paid any attention to it before. But the most impolitic acts of the Roman Bishop, and the finest advertisement in favor of our work, has been lately committed by him. We shall speak afterwards of our plan of establishing soon a college or seminary at Sturgeon Bay as a training school for young priests destined to the mission. As soon as it became known that a lot had been secured upon which to build the aforesaid institution, it seems the Roman authorities became frightened, and what they had called a farce at first, now appeared to their minds a very serious and important matter. Not being able to prevent the work from being carried on, the Roman Bishop

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deemed it expedient to come personally from Green Bay to Sturgeon Bay, and there on the spot to deliver a discourse against the Old Catholics and their priest. Of course excommunications were renewed and the terms of heretics and apostates were freely made use of. But he committed the inconceivable blunder of asserting as a positive and certain fact what he knew perfectly well to be false. Not shrinking from uttering publicly a falsehood, he assured the congregation that Pere Vilatte had never been ordained a priest; that he was no priest at all, nor had any spiritual power or right to administer the Holy Sacraments, but that he was only an imposter sent by the enemies of the Church to destroy the work of GOD and scatter the flock of the LORD. This was too much. The majority of the audience knew that the statement was a lie, and judging the tree from its [13/14] fruits, they lost all confidence in him. For indeed how could anybody trust any longer the veracity of a church which resorts to such base means in order to combat its opponents? Nevertheless, Pere Vilatte, although acquainted with the Jesuitic maxim that the end justifies the means, was perfectly aware also of Voltaire's principle: "Mentez, mentez; il en restera quelquechose;" and therefor judged it expedient to publish in the two newspapers of Sturgeon Bay the following card:

A CARD.

To Whom it may Concern:

Inasmuch as Father Vilatte thinks of establishing himself in the city of Sturgeon Bay, he has concluded, in answer to certain rumors against the fact of his ordination to the Priesthood, to publish the following translations of his Letters of Orders, for the quieting of those persons who have been made to doubt his ordination, and in order that henceforth all persons may have evidence in regard to Father Vilatte's ordination, and may know that the objector is liable to legal proceedings.

I. Letters attesting Father Vilatte's ordination to "Ordines Minores," including the order of sub-Deacon. From Dr. Edward Herzog, Catholic Bishop.

I, the undersigned, do hereby testify that I have conferred upon Mr. Renatus Vilatte, who has been presented by the Right Reverend John Hobart Brown, Catholic Bishop of the see of Fond du Lac, in the State of Wisconsin, in the United States of North America, and also recommended, the Minor Orders and the order of sub-Deacon, in the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, at Bern, the priests James Rizzi and Charles Weckerle assisting.

(L.S.) + EDWARD HERZOG, Bishop.

Bern, the 5th day of June, 1885.

II. Letters attesting Father Vilatte's ordination to the Diaconate. From Dr. Edward Herzog, Catholic Bishop.

I, the undersigned, do hereby testify that I have conferred upon Mr. Renatus Vilatte, sub-Deacon, who has been presented and recommended by the Right Reverend John Hobart Brown, Catholic Bishop of the see of Fond du Lac, in the State of Wisconsin, in the United States of North America, to the order of the Diaconate, in the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, at Bern, the priests James Rizzi and Charles Weckerle assisting.

(L.S.) + EDWARD HERZOG, Bishop.

Bern, the 6th day of June, 1885.

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[15] III. Letters attesting Father Vilatte's ordination to the Priesthood. From Dr. Edward Herzog, Catholic Bishop.

I, the undersigned, do hereby testify that I have to-day, in the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, at Bern, the Priests Charles Hale, from Baltimore, and Charles Migy, Catholic Priest in Bern, assisting, conferred upon he Rev. Mr. Rene Vilatte, who has been presented and recommended by the Right Reverend John Hobart Brown, Bishop of the see of Fond du Lac, in the State of Wisconsin, in the United States of North America, the order of the Priesthood, according to the rite of the Western Catholic Church.

(L.S.) + EDWARD HERZOG, Bishop.

Bern, the 7th day of June, 1885.

REMARK:—The Rt. Reverend Edward Herzog, D.D., of Switzerland, was a prominent dignitary in the Roman Catholic communion up to the year 1870, when he left that communion on account of the proclamation of papal infallibility.

SECTION II.

ITS PRESENT CONDITION.—We resume now the work that has been accomplished, and present a clear statement of the present situation both spiritual and financial. The headquarters of the mission continue to be at Little Sturgeon; but soon must be transferred to Sturgeon Bay, as will be explained in the following pages.

The mission owns now (1) at Little Sturgeon a lot of forty acres, a gift of Mrs. Waterbury, of Brooklyn, with a beautiful church and a parish house erected on it; both of which are provided with the necessary and required furniture, accommodations, ornaments, etc., the whole of which is free from debt (less eight hundred dollars, as stated before). (2) At Sturgeon Bay a lot of four acres and a half free of any debt, and ready for building upon it the Mission College, a church and priests' residence. This situation is destined to become in the future the headquarters of the mission. The parish of Little Sturgeon counts now about one hundred families, amounting a population of about four hundred souls, of which one hundred and thirty are communicants. The entire population of Little Sturgeon belongs now to the Old Catholic Church, with the exception of some ten families who [15/16] are still Roman Catholics, at least in name, for divine service has ceased among them, and their churches are deserted. These families are slowly but surely coming over to the Old Catholics, as several of them are already attending our services on Sunday.

The Mission counts now two priests; Rev. Rene Vilatte, the founder of the church and the head or general missionary in this country, and Rev. Ernest DeBeaumont, ordained a Roman Catholic priest, but connected for many years with the Anglican Church, and now resuming his ministry as a priest among the Old Catholics. He is destined to be the president of the new college or seminary for the training of young priests, to be erected at Sturgeon Bay.

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The mission has now three students. One of them, a young German, is near finishing his studies at Nashotah, and will be ordained a priest two or three years hence. One other young man is studying at Racine College, and a third one, receiving private instruction, is going to be numbered among the six or seven first students of our new college at Sturgeon Bay. We are only waiting for the new building to commence our work. Some five or six hundred dollars have been collected for that purpose, and money has been subscribed for the education of two students; but there we stand until new gifts will enable us to proceed.

SECTION III.

THE OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE.—Everybody, we are sure, after a moment's reflection, will see at a glance the absolute necessity of the erection of a school of training for young priests. To send our students to Episcopal schools around us is too expensive for this poor mission; and besides, does not answer our purpose. The education in Episcopal schools, however prominent they may be, is quite English, while we want French missionaries for our French missions. Moreover, although the Creed or doctrine be the same, our Old Catholic ritual is entirely different from the Episcopal liturgy. Can anyone doubt the necessity of training young priests for the work?

[17] All our efforts and labor of the past and present will be of no use if we do not enable ourselves to perpetuate our work. At the best it would be without it as a building without foundation, destined to fall within a short time. So it is clear that not to advance and make progress is to retrograde. One or two men can do but little in this broad field of labor. Pere Vilatte has been requested to extend his labors to six or seven other villages; more than that, he is asked on all sides to come and found new missions. But he cannot accept, for it is impossible to go everywhere and to do everything. The Bishop has been asked to send priests to labor in this field, but is unable to do so. Consequently the best and only way to meet this crying need is to establish a school or seminary in which we can educate young men for the ministry, who will, at the end of a few years, be fitted to go out and carry the gospel to thousands of French-speaking people in Wisconsin, and even in neighboring states. There are also many Indians around us who speak French, and they of course are included in our scheme of evangelization. As an illustration of our wants we give here the translation of a petition from the inhabitants of Red River, a town situated 18 miles from Little Sturgeon, which has lately been presented to the Bishop and favourably received. It is simply expressed, but shows how clearly the aims of the movement are understood by the people whom it most concerns.

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PETITION.

“We the undersigned of the parish of St. Francis, request the Rev. Father Vilatte, priest of the Catholic Church of the Precious Blood of JESUS at Little Sturgeon, to come and administer to our spiritual wants in our parish of the Red River; and we pray him to do all that he can with the ecclesiastical authorities of the Catholic Church of America to obtain for us all the spiritual advantages which this branch of the Catholic Church will be able to grant us. On our part we promise to do our very best to organize among us a true Christian Church. Fatigued of our abandonment we pray Father Vilatte to present our attention to whom it concerns, and to assist us and be our interpreter with the Right Rev. Bishop Brown, whom we have not the honor to be acquainted with.”

Similar petitions have been sent from Lincoln and other places. We add for the comfort of Christian souls, that as he now has with him a second priest Pere Vilatte will soon go among them, and that in the relatively near future a new Old Catholic Mission will be founded at Red River.

[18]

Some Important Documents

LETTERS, RECOMMENDATIONS, APPROBATIONS AND SUB-
SCRIPTIONS, RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE
OLD CATHOLICS IN WISCONSIN.

A Letter of Bishop J. H. H. Brown, of Fond du Lac, to *The Church Eclectic*.

FOND DU LAC, July 17, 1885.

My Dear Brother.—For some time a movement of an important character has been going on in this Diocese, some of the features of which have just become public. I am anxious that it should not be misunderstood, and so I write to you that you may have accurate information about it, as a Church editor ought to have. This is it, in brief. In this Diocese English speaking people are in a minority. We have masses of Germans, Belgians, Hollanders, Welsh, Danes, Swedes, Poles and Norwegians. In some districts English is hardly known. This state of affairs is very trying to the Diocese, as missions and parishes succumb to the foreigner and new work is difficult. I have long felt that the Church ought to meet the stranger and be his guide and friend, and that then his children would naturally become hers. Near Green Bay are 30,000 Belgians, French speaking, of course. Many of these—I am told six or eight thousand—are somewhat affected by the Alt Katholik movement. An unusually intelligent and sagacious young Frenchman offered himself to me as a missionary to these people. His acquirements being sufficient and the exigency great, I determined, after consulting with some of our Bishops, to send the young gentleman to

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Bishop Herzog. The object was two-fold. First, to save discussion as to authority. We had reason to think that all Alt Katholik ministrations would be welcomed. Ours would be questioned. Next, we wished to win the immigrants of mature age, men and women with religious habits formed and with prejudices fixed, and not likely to even learn the English language. This class are the leaders of new communities. If they become indifferent or irreligious, their children are likely to be worse than themselves. If we get them, the next generation will be with us thoroughly. It is too much to ask these people to set aside the tastes and sentiments of a lifetime. Hence I am seeking to say to them: "Accept the Church's authority, her ministers and Sacraments, but keep your ritual, so long as you keep your nationality and native language. Sing your grand old hymns, light your candles, burn your incense, but have a pure faith and maintain Catholic unity." You see how the plan would take in its scope Scandinavians as well as Germans and French.

Bishop Herzog kindly assented to my request. Mr. Vilatte is back and at work. I send you a copy of our Diocesan paper, with a letter in [18/19] it from Dr. Hale which is both interesting and important. You will infer, I think, the rest that I might say. Faithfully yours,

J.H. HOBART BROWN.

A letter of Pere Hyacinthe Loyson to Father Vilatte.

NEUILLY, 29 Boulevard Inkermann.

Rev. and Dear Sir.—The Pere Hyacinthe charges me to write you, making his excuses for not replying to your letter before this; but illness and incessant occupation have prevented him. He now begs to say to you that under the serious circumstances in which you are placed, and with the very grave matter you propose to him, he strongly advises you to come over to Paris and confer with him *viva voce*. A mistake would be fatal to you and to the important work you propose to undertake. There is much to be said which it is impossible to say by letter. Then your ordination, which should certainly be by the rite Latin, can be easily accomplished by our Old Catholic Bishop—l'éveque de Berne. This is a *sine qua non*, if you hope for any success in a true Catholic reform. If you act with wisdom and charity, as becomes a priest of the Holy Church of Christ, you can do a great work. But if you make a false step at the beginning you will surely fail, and not only injure your own future vocation, but do great harm to the cause of true Catholicism and religious reform.

You could, doubtless, spare a month to make this voyage, and the expense, with economy, is not very difficult to meet. In case you cannot possible come, then you should take advice from the Bishop of the American Episcopal Church of your Diocese, who is a good and wise man. And you should try, by the power of all Christian charity, to keep the confidence and love of your people, the faithful. You will be glad to hear

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that God is blessing our work in France. And with the hope of seeing you soon in Paris I remain, dear Rev. sir,

Yours very sincerely in Christ,

E.H. LOYSON, For Pere Hyacinthe.

Another letter from the same to the same.

NEUILLY-S. SEINE PRES PARIS,
Boulevard Inkermann 29, 6 May, 1885.

Dear Sir:—Pere Hyacinthe charges me to write you again to say that he has written Bishop Herzog concerning you, and that if you have made your studies in the Roman Church and taken the Minor Orders, as we are informed you have, and bring with you letters of recommendation from the American Episcopal Bishop of your Diocese, there is no doubt whatever that Bishop Herzog will confer the Priesthood upon you. And this will imply perhaps a residence at Berne of two or three weeks.

Pere Hyacinthe wishes to inform you that he has some important things to communicate to you touching a Catholic reform in America. That he may not miss your visit when you arrive in Paris, he begs to tell you that he will be at home from the 15th to the last of June, when he goes to the Pyrenees, and will probably not be back at Paris until the last of August. So he thinks you should try and be here in June. You will please consider our house your home while here.

Pere Hyacinthe goes to Berne two weeks hence, and will confer with [19/20] Bishop Herzog concerning you. You doubtless know that most of the steam ship companies make a reduction for clergymen. Show them your letters from your Episcopal Bishop.

Hoping to hear from you soon, I remain, dear sir,

Yours very truly,

E. HYACINTHE LOYSON.

Letter of introduction of Pere Vilatte to Bishop Herzog, of Berne,
by Bishop Brown, of Fond du Lac.

FOND DU LAC, May 5, 1885.

The Right Reverend Dr. Herzog, Bishop of Berne:

My Dear Brother:—Permit me to introduce to your confidence and esteem the bearer of this letter, Mr. Rene Vilatte, a candidate for Holy Orders in the Diocese of Fond du Lac. Mr. Vilatte is placed in peculiar circumstances. Educated for the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church, he found himself unable to receive the recent Vatican decrees, and for a short time associated himself with the Presbyterian communion, but at last,

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by the mercy of GOD, was led into this branch of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. He resided for a while at Green Bay, a city of this Diocese. In the neighborhood of this place there are now settled about 30,000 Belgians; of these a large number, probably 8,000, are believed to be included to the principles of a pure and primitive Catholicism. Several delegations of these Belgians have waited on Mr. Vilatte and besought him to become their priest. Mr. Vilatte's character for piety, sobriety, purity, intelligence and prudence, has been tested to the satisfaction of the authorities of this Diocese. Our canons, however, require a longer probation as a candidate than the exigency of the circumstances will bear. At the suggestion of Pere Hyacinthe (Loyson), approved by the Bishop of Connecticut and other Bishops, and by the Faculty of Nashotah Seminary, and by me, Mr. Vilatte approaches you, requesting you to ordain him to the priesthood as speedily as you find it possible, that he may enter upon the great work to which he seems specially summoned. It has seemed expedient to send him to you that he may learn personally something of the aims and spirit of the great movement of which you are the recognized leader, and so be fitted to co-operate with you in some degree in this country. Mr. Vilatte's pecuniary means are limited, and he desires to be absent from this Diocese as short a time as possible. I ask that you ordain him to the priesthood, and I attest his character briefly, but sufficiently, by saying that I am willing to ordain him if it should not seem expedient to you so to do.

Truly and lovingly, your brother and servant in the Holy Church of our Lord,

J. H. HOBART BROWN, Bishop of Fond du Lac.

Certificate of Bishop Brown by which Pere Vilatte is authorized to receive subscriptions and gifts to erect a school.

FOND DU LAC, January 6, 1887.

Feast of the Epiphany.

This is to certify that the Rev. Rene Vilatte, General Missionary of the French-speaking residents of the Diocese of Fond du Lac, is duly authorized to solicit and receive subscriptions and gifts in aid of the important work which he represents. Eighteen months ago the Rev. Mr. Vilatte begun his missionary labor at Little Sturgeon. Now he has [20/21] over three hundred souls in his charge, of whom ninety are communicants. A glebe of forty acres has been purchased, a chapel and presbytery built, at a total cost of \$3,700, of which \$2,200 have already been given. I have before me a petition of the inhabitants of Red River in Kewaunee County asking that the Rev. Mr. Vilatte be authorized to extend his ministrations to them. It is perfectly plain that to extend and perpetuate the work so

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hopefully opened the missionary should have the means of associating with himself some clergymen and candidates interested in French-speaking people. Hence it seems to me that the Rev. Father Vilatte would be wise to seek for the gross sum of five thousand dollars to pay the indebtedness already incurred and to erect a suitable building for a school, no such undertaking to be made, however, until the present debt is paid. From what I have seen of the influence of this Old Catholic Mission (so called because the Old Catholic rites are allowed in it as most suitable for the present religious condition of the people) I am satisfied that it is likely to be effective for good among the Indians dwelling in its neighborhood. I commend cordially the whole work to the sympathy and confidence of Churchmen everywhere. The missionary will report to me his proceedings. Contributions will be acknowledged in the Diocese of Fond du Lac, and may be given to the missionary himself or sent to J. B. Perry, Esq., Treasurer of the Diocese, or to the undersigned.

J. H. HOBART BROWN, Bishop of Fond du Lac.

A Letter of Pere Hyacinthe Loyson inviting Pere Vilatte to come to Paris.

NEUILLY S. SEIN, PRES PARIS, Boulevard Inkermann, 29.

January 6, 1887, Fete de l'Epiphanie.

Dear Sir:—I am charged by Pere Hyacinthe, who is overtaxed with the duties of the season, to express to you his profound satisfaction in receiving such good news of your work of Catholic reform as you have kindly sent him in your recent letter. GOD'S blessing is evidently upon you. Our prayer is that He may so guide and strengthen you that your work may grow and extend for the salvation of many souls, for their deliverance from sin, superstition and death, and to the breaking down of the great and cruel barriers with which fallible men have imprisoned the Church of CHRIST, and hidden therein the beneficent light of the Gospel, putting heavy chains upon tender souls, and excluding men from the liberty to which GOD has called them for their present happiness and for His ultimate glory.

You in America are in the midst of conditions far more favorable for the development of such a work than we are here in this Old World, with all our hindrances of error, prejudice and subjection to the state. There you have acquired, by transplantation into new and generous soil, a *savoir faire* unknown to us. Your difficulties are healthy, and give you growth and victory, where often with us our trials are those of the vanquished. And now I must communicate to you an idea which seems to Pere Hyacinthe and some of the leading members of our Church to be a wise and practical one. It is this. To invite you to come over and help us for a few months in the new organization which is projected this spring. Our work—yours in America and ours in France—is a Catholic [21/22] one, as was that of the

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Apostles, who were called from place to place, as the young churches needed them. The elements abound, but what is needed is an organizer. The question of a theological seminary and episcopal jurisdiction is to be considered, and the different branches of reformed Catholic Churches drawn closer together. And we believe that America may have a large and salutary part to play in the reconstruction of the Church on true Catholic and evangelical lines.

The Pere Hyacinthe begs you to reply at once, saying whether you could come or not if he asked you definitely. Of course we should look after the paying of your passage here and back.

Hoping the new year is a happy one for you and your church, I remain, dear Rev. sir, your sincerely, *In Christo et in fide*,

E.J. LOYSON, For the Pere Hyacinthe.

Reply to Pere Hyacinthe.

Dear Pere:—My most sincere thanks for the honor you do me in placing your confidence in me, but it is impossible for me to leave America. The work of the Old Catholics here takes up all my time and my activity. To abandon America would be the happiness of the Romans and would compromise our young church. I thank Pere Hyacinthe Loyson, telling him that perhaps the day will come when a man more capable and more worthy than I will take up the lead of the Old Catholic movement. Then I would be free, but for the present, to abandon America is impossible, and would be a crime.

RENE VILATTE.

A Letter from Bishop Paret, Baltimore, Diocese of Maryland.

277 MADISON AVE., BALTIMORE, March 20, 1886.

My Dear Rev. Brother:—I recognize you as a Priest of the Church, under the acknowledged jurisdiction of one of the Bishops of the Church in this country, and as such you need only the consent of the rector of Mount Calvary Church to celebrate at the altar there. I am sure he will cheerfully give it.

Yours truly,

WILLIAM PARET, Bishop of Maryland.

Rev. R. Vilatte.

DIOCESAN OFFICE, MILWAUKEE, Oct. 26.

My Dear Father Vilatte:—I send you, with my blessing and my love, eight crucifixes for the children who are to receive their first Communion on All Saints' morning. I think oftentimes of you in your glorious work on the peninsula, and I pray most earnestly that our Heavenly FATHER may

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guide and strengthen you in all that pertains to your faithful, self-denying labors for the extension of the Church and the good of the souls for whom CHRIST died.

In CHRIST and in peace,

E.R. WELLES, Bishop of Wisconsin.

The Rev. Father Vilatte, Little Sturgeon, Wis.

PATRONIZING NOTES AND SUBSCRIPTIONS.

DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD, June 30, 1887.

My Dear Brother:—Just back from a visitation, and find your note. Kindly acknowledge the receipt of the enclosed . . which I promised you. May GOD bless you and your work. Faithfully yours,
GEORGE F. SEYMOUR, Bishop of Springfield.

[23] *For the Rev. R. Vilatte, Rector Little Sturgeon, Door Co. Wis.*

I commend the appeal of the Rev. R. Vilatte to the clergy and people of this Diocese, for his own sake, for his Bishop's sake and, above all, for the work's sake.

WM. CROSWELL DOANE, Bishop of Albany, New York.

I have great pleasure in adding my name; this work is of vast importance; it would be hard to speak too strongly of it; and the way to carry it on, and the only way, is to give the Rev. Mr. Rene Vilatte the means of doing that special thing which is most urgent, building up a school of instruction to be a centre of influence in a wide region.

MORGAN DIX, Trinity Church, New York.

BOSTON, Church of the Advent.

The work of the Rev. Rene Vilatte among the French Catholics in Wisconsin has been very fully made known to me by those who have visited it, and is of no ordinary missionary character. I trust that ample means will be provided him for his school.

C.C. GRAFTON

PHILADELPHIA, PA., March 10, 1887.

I cordially endorse this work in which the Rev. Mr. Vilatte is engaged, and deem it eminently worthy of the substantial aid and warm sympathy of the Churchmen of Philadelphia.

I.L. NICHOLSON.

ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH, PROVIDENCE, R.I.

The work of Pere Vilatte has my warmest sympathy. I regard it as one of the greatest opportunities of the American Church, and will do my

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utmost to aid it. An offering for this object will soon be made in this parish, which has also substantially assisted Pere Vilatte in measure not necessary to specify here.

GEO. MCCLELLAN FISKE.

ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA.

I think the work of Mr. Vilatte to be of very great importance indeed, and hope in the future to do much for it.

S.D. MCCONNELL.

ANNUNCIATION CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA.

I have had exceptionally good opportunities of examining the work which Father Vilatte is doing in the Belgian settlement in Wisconsin, under the direction of the Bishop of Fond du Lac, and take pleasure in most cordially commending it.

H.G. BATTERSON.

ST. JAMES' CHURCH, CHICAGO.

I make the following offering for the benefit of the Old Catholic Mission du Precious Sang, under the charge of Rev. Rene Vilatte.

Rev. W. H. VIBBERT, S.T.D.

I shall take or ask an offering for this highly important work before June, 1887.

G. WILLIAMS, St. George's Church, Detroit.

TRINITY CHURCH, ALPENA.

I shall present this important work to my congregation before June, 1887, and ask an offering for the same.

J.A. NOCK, Rector.

[24]

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, TROY, N.Y.

I shall present this important work to the congregation of St. Paul's, Troy, and ask an offering for the same.

Rev. H. ASHTON.

CHRIST CHURCH, ELIZABETH, N.J.

The Rev. Pere Vilatte has my cordial sympathy in his work, and I will do all that I can to aid him.

H. H. OBERLY.

Rt. Rev. Henry Potter, D.D., LL.D., N.Y.

Rt. Rev. Dr. McLaren, Bishop of Chicago.

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Rev. Dr. Huntington, Grace Church, N.Y.
Rev. Arthur Ritchie, St. Ignatius' Ch., N.Y.
Rev. C. R. Hale, S.T.D., Davenport, Ia.
Rev. T. McKee Brown, St. Mary the Virgin.
Rev. Henry Satterlee, D.D., Calvary Church.
Rev. P.A.H. Brown, St. John's Chapel.
Rev. Dr. Houghton, Transfiguration Church.
Rev. C. E. Swope, D.D., New York.
Choir boys of Trinity Ch., by Jos. W. Hull.
Rev. Dr. C. Locke, Grace Church, Chicago.
Dr. S. Philip Kautakee, St. Paul.
Rev. J. H. Knowles, St. Clement's, Chicago.
Rev. Geo. Z. Gray, D.D., Cambridge.
Rev. R. Harris, Buffalo.
Rev. S.R. Fuller, St. John's, Buffalo.
Rev. L. VanBokkelen, D.D., Buffalo.
Rev. John W. Brown, S.T.D., Buffalo.
Rev. F.J. Hall, Seminary, Chicago.
Rev. Edward Larrabee, Ascension, Chicago.
Rev. W.J. Gold, S.T.D., Dean of Western Theological Seminary, Chicago.
Rev. F.P. Davenport, Cairo, Illinois.
Rev. L.S. Osborne, Chicago.
Rev. T. N. Morrison, Jr., Epiphany, Chicago.
Rev. Chas. Bixby, Chicago.
St. Luke's Mission, Chicago.
Rev. J. H. Johnson, Christ Church, Detroit.
Rev. J. N. Blanchard, Detroit.
Rev. Henry M. Kirkby, Detroit.
Rev. D. L. Schwartz, Albany.
Holy Innocents' Church, Albany, by Rector.
St. John's Church, Troy, by Rector.
St. Barnabas' Church, Troy, by Rector.
Church of the Holy Cross, Troy, by Rector.
Church of the Ascension, Troy, N.Y.
St. John's Ch., Cohoes, Rev. P. S. Sill Rector.
Rev. A. L. Brewer, San Mateo, California.
Rev. A. Chambre, D.D., Lowell, Mass.
Rev. E.W. Smith, Fall River, Mass.
St. John's Church, Providence, by Rector.
Grace Church, Providence, by Rector.
Rev. W.D. Martin, St. Catharine's Hall, Augusta, Maine.
Rev. Dr. C. Miel, St. Sauveur's Ch., Phila.
Rev. James A. Bolles, D.D., Cleveland, O.

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Rev. Joseph Clarke, D.D., Nashotah.
Mrs. Waterbury, Brooklyn, Long Island.
Mrs. Virginia Dresser, Secretary of Women's Auxiliary, Springfield Ill.
Rev. W. Adams, D.D., Professor Nashotah.
Rev. George G. Carter, President of Nashotah Seminary.
Rev. Dr. T. M. Riley, Professor, Nashotah.
Miss E. Mayo, Elizabeth, New Jersey.
Mrs. Batterson, Philadelphia, Penn.
Miss Anna V. Buffam, Providence, R.I.
Miss Emily Howell, Elizabeth, New Jersey.
Mrs. Sarah Tillinghast, Detroit.
Mrs. S. W. Frisbie, Detroit.
Miss Mary Dickenson, Detroit.
St. Peter's Church, Albany, by Rector.
Mrs. V. O. Burhans, Warrensburgh, N.Y.
General and Mrs. Ames, Providence, R.I.
Miss Jennie M. Clark, Providence.
Miss Mary Grinnell, Providence.
Madame Emma DeBeaumont, New York.
Mr. Jules David, New York.
Miss Turrell, St. Ignatius's Church
Mrs. Homer, St. Ignatius' Church, N.Y.
A friend of Miss Turrell, New York.
Rev. Samuel J. French, Peekskill, N.Y.
Rev. H. C. E. Costelle, Green Bay, Wis.
Miss Leavenworth, Milwaukee, Wis.
Mrs. Adams, Nashotah, Wis.
Mrs. Cole, Nashotah, Wis.
Mrs. Rogers, Kenosha, Wis.
Sister Margaret Clare, C.S.M., Kenosha.
Rev. Joseph Jameson, Antigo, Wisconsin.
Rev. Percival Eubanks, Lexington, N.C.
Miss S. J. Ballard.
The Students of the General Theological Seminary, New York City, in
1886.
Mrs. J. H. Clark.
Miss J. Masson Gross.
Mrs. G. McClellan Fiske.
Miss Dominic, New York City.
Mrs. Bishop, Cleveland, Ohio.
Mrs. Homer, St. Ignatius' Church.
Rev. W. C. French, D.D., Cleveland, Ohio.
Rev. C. R. D. Crittenton, Beaver Dam, Wis.

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Rev. George William Douglas, S.T.D.
Rev. William Fellongen.
Rev. James Mulchahey, D.D., New York.
Rev. J. S. Kent, Lawrence, Mass.
Rev. A.M. Backus, Dedham, Mass.
Rev. Edward Abbott, Cambridge, Mass.
Dr. Shattuck, Boston, Mass.
Mr. William S. Johnston, Philadelphia.
Mr. Herbert Welsh, Philadelphia.
Rev. James Haughton, Bryn Mawr, Pa.
Rev. J.S.B. Hodges, S.T.D., Baltimore.
Rev. Robert H. Paine, Baltimore.
Rev. W.W. Williams, D.D., Baltimore.
Rev. B. A. Mueller, M.A. Congregation.
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